



Appropriations Committee

Public Hearing – February 23, 2023

HB 6659 AAC The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 And MAKING Appropriations Therefor

Jim Williams, CT Government Relations Director
American Heart Association

I would like to thank the leadership and members of the Appropriations Committee for providing me with the opportunity to provide comments on HB 6659, which we **feel should include funding for healthy, free school meals to all students free of charge, regardless of family income for the school year 2023-2024.**

Federal child nutrition waivers passed during the pandemic decreased child hunger and poverty, allowing all students to have access to free school meals. That funding has expired and now children who depended on it are going hungry again. States right now are stepping up to fill in the gap and ensure that all children, regardless of family income, can obtain healthy meals throughout the year and have the best chance to learn and thrive in school. California, Colorado, Maine, and Vermont have already passed legislation to ensure no child goes hungry. Connecticut must be next!

Why is this issue important and deserving of your support?

- Food insufficiency dropped by 14% among students who participated in the National School Lunch Program's free or reduced-priced lunch meals.¹
- Students who eat school lunches tend to take in more whole grains, vegetables, and dairy and fewer refined sugars and empty calories than those who bring their lunches from home.²
- Students who have more nutritious diets tend to perform better and pay more attention in school.³
- Participation by all students in school meal programs increases when meals are provided for free, resulting in increased revenue by way of federal reimbursement.⁴
- Healthy School Meals for ALL will eliminate issues of unpaid school meal debt and reduce administrative paperwork, freeing up school nutrition staff to focus on feeding kids.⁴

All children deserve access to healthy school meals. Let's make sure schools can provide them with all the tools they need to be successful in class. Please support funding for healthy school meals for all!

Respectively,

Jim Williams
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¹ Huang J, Barnidge E. Low-income children's participation in the National School Lunch Program and household food insufficiency. Soc Sci Med. 2016; 150: 8-14. Doi: 10.1016/j.SOCScimed.2015.12.020.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. April 2019.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-mealcost-study>. Accessed on April 12, 2020.

³ Lott M, Miller L, Arm K, Story M. Rapid Health Impact Assessment on USDA Proposed Changes to School Nutrition Standards. March 2020.
<http://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/rapid-health-impact-assessment-on-usda-proposed-changes-to-school-nutrition-standards>. Accessed April 16, 2020.

⁴ <http://fullplates.org/schoolmealsforall>